

anyone on the list sends an e-mail to the communal address, that e-mail is redistributed to all the subscribers. It's amazing how soon you get to know people, and how a sense of community can be created with people you've never met.

When looking for e-mail lists I use the search engine at <http://www.list.com/>. A search for "science fiction" gave me the following list (a search for other terms, such as "Star Trek," would have given different results):

SF-lit Science Fiction and Fantasy Listserv: mail the command information sf-lit to listproc@loc.gov

STWTF-L Gender Issues in Science Fiction: mail the command info STWTF-L to LISTSERV@VMA.CC.ND.EDU

UK-sf The United Kingdom Science Fiction/Fantasy List: mail the command information uk-sf to listproc@lists.pipex.com

UK-sf-books The UK Science Fiction/Fantasy Book List: mail the command information uk-sf-books to listproc@lists.pipex.com

I thought UK-sf looked interesting, so I sent off the information request, and received this reply within minutes:

"Despite the recent apathy regarding sf in the UK from some broadcasting quarters, there has been a surprising number of successes too, both now and from the past. This list is dedicated to the Science Fiction and other Telefantasy that the UK has spawned. There are many gems from many years, quite a few of which are being repeated even now! A useful definition of Telefantasy was posted by one of our subscribers, Anthony McKay:

A television drama containing aspects of science fiction or fantasy. British telefantasy is any telefantasy production MADE in the UK. Thus any drama containing examples of: time travel, ghosts, alternative futures, paranormal activities, science fiction, supernatural beings, etc, is telefantasy.

Some sf shows that could be discussed are: *Blake's Seven*, *Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, *Star Cops*, *Sapphire and Steel*, *Thunderbirds*, *Captain Scarlet*, *The Tomorrow People*, *Space: 1999*, *Survivors*, *Adam Adamant*, *The Prisoner*, *Day of the Triffids*, *She-Wolf of London*, *The Wanderer*, *Department-S*, *Danger Man*...

Please note that there are other lists on the listprocessor dealing with specific fantasy series: DRWHO-L (*Doctor Who*), RED-DWARF (*Red Dwarf*), FAB-UFO (*Gerry Anderson's UFO* series), FAB-L (*Gerry Anderson* discussion list). A companion list is available for the discussion of UK sf books

and authors; this is called UK-SF-BOOKS (original, eh!).

Through the black arts I found that as of mid-January this list had 199 subscribers, roughly 25% of whom appeared to be in the UK, with most of the rest in the US.

It will be clear by now that there are many different sources of information, and many different ways of participating on the Net. This is, of course, often confusing. A system designed to help with this confusion is the FAQ – Frequently Asked Questions. Not only are FAQs available on how to use the Net, but also on subjects to do with Life, the Universe, and, well, nearly Everything. FAQs usually take the format of an introduction, and a series of questions and answers. If the document is large enough it will be divided into sections, and if the subject is large enough there may be a number of documents.

There is (naturally) a searchable index of FAQs available at <http://www.cis.ohio-state.edu/htbin/search-usenet-faqs/form>. And so, (naturally) I search for "science fiction." The results included, but were not limited to the following:

Space FAQ

Mystery Science Theatre 3000 FAQ

SF-references-in-music List

Computer Science Technical Report Archive Sites

Astro/Space Frequently Seen Acronyms

Cryonics FAQ

Adventure Authoring Systems FAQ

Nonlinear Science FAQ

FAQ for rec.arts.books.reviews (December, 1995)

The Space FAQ is actually 13 documents, each focusing on a different topic. These are: Data Sources, Calculations, Planetary Probe History, Network Resources, Orbital and Planetary Launch Services, Interest Groups & Publications, Mission Schedules, References, Introduction, How to Become an Astronaut, Upcoming Planetary Probes, Controversial Questions, Addresses.

A search for "Star Trek" gave the following:

Star Trek Actors' Other Roles FAQ

Star Trek Ships: Television & Film

Star Trek Books-on-Tape

Relativity and FTL Travel – Introduction

Star Wars FAQ

Star Trek Episodes Guide

Stardates in Star Trek

Battlestar Galactica FAQ

Star Trek Comics Checklist

Star Trek Locations

Star Trek Book Guide

An Introduction to the Rec.Arts.StarTrek.* Hierarchy

Klingon Language FAQ

The stardates FAQ is incredibly detailed and long – and probably contains more info than any general reference is likely to have. The reference to the rec.arts.startrek.* hierarchy is nothing to do with captains and admirals, but is a guide to the *Star Trek* newsgroups.

The Internet is a rapidly expanding global social phenomenon. Nobody knows how many people use it (estimates from 20-60 million may or may not be close), but it is growing incredibly fast, as more and more people get online to do business and conduct their social lives. For the sf fan there is a massive array of free information and entertainment, much of which just isn't available anywhere else – and certainly not as easily available. Of course, it's not just about sf, for this article could equally as well have been written about many other topics.

The technology of the Internet is developing rapidly. It has already expanded the bounds of the possible. I'm looking forward to future possibilities with genuine excitement. Of course, we're looking to do some good things on the British Airways site at <http://www.british-airways.com>. With something as big as the Internet it's always difficult to know where to start, especially when, as is the case at present, the level of knowledge varies so widely between people. I've not tried here to explain everything, and there is a hell of a lot that I've left out. If there's enough interest I can follow up with more in-depth reviews, or general articles, or snippets – or what do you want? Let the editor know.

If you're interested enough to get connected and don't know how (try the Internet mags in the newsagent), then I can send you a document I've written with some guidance. I'll only send it on to people who send an A5 SAE, and I apologize now that I don't have the time to engage in correspondence. My address is 65 Dutch Barn Close, Stanwell, Staines, TW19 7NG (e-mail: nick@netwiz.demon.co.uk).

Nick Gassman

Typesetter's note: e-mail addresses consist of very long unbroken strings of characters that simply don't fit into our usual text measure, so they are broken here for typographic reasons. In use, they should be entered exactly as typed but without the line breaks. Happy surfing. PB

liver's Travels. *You read it in childhood, but did you ever read the full unabridged text?*

The original adult text? I may have done; it's so difficult to tell. I certainly read childhood editions which would have been abbreviated and really were just the first book. But I think I've dipped into the adult version, and probably read the first book and skimmed the other three. I must go back to them: I'm probably stealing right, left and centre, without realizing it!

It differs from the other books you mentioned in that it is, arguably, science fiction. There is satire on science and scientists there...

Oh, yes. Sunbeams from cucumbers – nice idea, that. That's very sf. A touch of *The Crystal World* in there...

Your short story "The Drowned Giant" was a "take" on Gulliver in Lilliput...

Absolutely. Yes, Swift was a big influence; and, of course, you know the story about solving the Irish baby problem, "A Modest Proposal"? There was an enormous influence there. I think "A Modest Proposal" saturates a book like *The Atrocity Exhibition*, particularly the last chapters where those pseudo-experimental tests are being described.

"Love and Napalm: Export USA"? Were you conscious of that at the time? Were you writing deliberately in that Swiftian tradition?

No, because I wasn't mimicking Swift's style or approach. But the notion of taking an utterly extreme and preposterous idea and treating it in a straight-faced way lies behind "Plan for the Assassination of Jacqueline Kennedy" and the Reagan story. All those weird laboratory tests that I set up – in which housewives were being shown atrocity footage – sounded, at the time, almost pornographic... They've done all that subsequently; it's absolutely bizarre! There's hardly a thing I invented there that hasn't actually occurred in research labs in the last 20 years. Because, of course, the tendencies I was satirizing in those pieces were the tendencies of scientists – particularly in the so-called soft sciences – no longer to take their subject matter from nature but to invent it themselves. This is where science and pornography begin to move on a collision course. Yes, Swift was a big influence; I mean, I hope he was; I would love to have been influenced by Swift in a positive way.

Would you object to the word "satire" being used in connection with books like Crash, Concrete Island and High-Rise?

